

Ohio District Export Councils

Bringing Exporting Expertise to Local Communities

by Cory Churches

Export America

Collaborating with the community is what the Ohio District Export Councils are all about. As with other Councils or DEC's, the majority of their activities fall into five categories: trade education, legislative and media outreach, fund-raising, and special projects.

Ohio warrants having two DEC's, north and south, due to the fact that the state is home to seven major metropolitan areas and a large number of manufacturing and services exporters. The DEC's work to provide necessary support in their respective service territories.

The DEC's are linked to the U.S. Export Assistance Centers in Cincinnati and Cleveland. Overall, Ohio has worked to reinvigorate its membership to ensure diversity of geography, representation by congressional district, industry sector coverage, and expertise. Members are also evaluated on the basis of their ability to make a concrete and consistent time commitment to promoting the goals of the DEC. Skills are matched directly to tasks, and meetings are held to a bare minimum in order to maximize time spent on achieving success.

Both Ohio DEC's frequently participate in and initiate commercial briefings by overseas officers as well as ambassadors to the United States to educate community export leaders.

Occasionally, in order to reach as broad audiences as possible, visiting commercial officers are guests at a high-level luncheon and later meet at a smaller community function, such as a Rotary Club meeting and conduct one-on-one counseling sessions with local companies. This way, the information that the officer has to share reaches a more diverse group of exporters and potential exporters.

Other trade education activities include sponsoring seminars on export controls and regulations, the potential for doing business in a particular market or region, and the mechanics of the export process. Ohio U.S. Export Assistance Centers as well as DEC's have also promoted the outreach efforts of the U.S. Commerce Department's Market Access and Compliance team when it toured Ohio, telling businesses how to tap into the numerous services offered by its network.

One of the goals of the DEC's as well as the export assistance centers is to increase the number of clients and therefore exporters. Joe Dehner, chairman of the Southern Ohio District Export Council, has laid out several ambitious goals for this year and is planning an expansion of an annual event: a global town meeting. In past years, a variety of speakers have come together with business and community participants to discuss the effects and results of globalization. During the conference last March, panel participants included consumer advocate

Ralph Nader, Proctor & Gamble Chairman John Pepper, and Harvard theologian Lawrence Sullivan. The annual event brings together hundreds in the community for a frank discussion of global issues from all perspectives. Understanding the challenges of globalization is a trade education priority for the SODEC. Our town hall meetings mobilize the public concern, letting them listen critically, contribute thoughtfully, and take away a greater appreciation of the causes and issues that most deeply divide people. In a civil setting, town hall meetings allow contending sides be heard and acknowledged," says Dehner

The SODEC also organized and hosted an eight-state DEC meeting designed to allow members to share best practices,



A recent U.S. export regulations seminar, sponsored by the Southern Ohio DEC, draws 125 attendees, media, as well as Senator Voinovich.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Commercial Service.

collaborate where possible, and generally network to pull the nationwide DEC network closer together.

Dao Le of the U.S. Export Assistance Center in Cincinnati has worked closely with the SODEC for the last three years supporting its efforts. According to Le, the DEC's are an integral part of bringing exporting to local communities, providing useful expertise and training to new exporters, and generally educating the public and Congress about the benefits of exporting.

"No one champions the Commercial Service's mission better than the Southern Ohio DEC. The members have effectively developed a variety of contacts in the community and identified areas to promote the common cause—be it trade education, legislative and media outreach, or fund-raising. Its mixture of tangible deliverables is truly impressive," says Le.

The Northern Ohio District Export Council is also focused on bringing the message and tools of exporting to local communities through outreach and education. Mike Miller, the executive secretary of the Northern Ohio DEC, reflects, "Both Ohio DEC's have exhibited incredible creativity in promoting overseas markets to smaller firms. The leadership of each has worked closely with the U.S. Export Assistance Centers to keep the community informed of changing conditions in overseas markets." During several commercial briefings, visiting senior commercial officers spoke to a larger group of businesses, talking about the conditions in country and the prospects for trade. Upcoming Northern Ohio DEC events include a seminar on doing business in Russia, a transportation security workshop in partnership with Customs and the Maritime Academy, and training on European Union regulatory matters.

Miller also notes the exceptional efforts by DEC members to reach



Photo courtesy of U.S. Commercial Service.

Members of the Northern Ohio DEC gather with Commerce Secretary Evans during a recent visit.

out to congressional representatives to spread the word about the U.S. Commercial Service as well as garner their assistance to promote exporting and U.S. Commercial Service products and services. "The Ohio DEC's adopted a long-standing practice from the Boston USEAC: to have congressional representatives send letters to their constituents touting exporting and Commercial Service assistance available. This lends added punch in reaching potential exporters," says Miller of the effectiveness of partnering with congressional offices.

The membership of the Northern Ohio DEC includes a variety of companies, such as Lincoln Electric, a *Fortune* 500 company; Clauss Cutlery, a manufacturer of hand tools; and Hexon, a manufacturer of industrial doors. The members reflect the overall Ohio exporting community. There is a balanced representation of manufacturers and service providers as well as large and small companies.

Membership criteria, while somewhat flexible, mandate that prospects be exporters (goods or services). Ideally, the collective membership will represent a broad base of congressional

representation, be geographically representative, and have strong ties to the community through other business groups. "It's our goal to strike a balance between community commitment and the commitment to the DEC," says Ken Lashutka, chairman of the NODEC.

Mr. Lashutka, a retired freight forwarder, has been involved in DEC activities for 15 years and has seen many changes in the organization. Lashutka is excited about the reinvigoration of the current membership. "There are so many opportunities for businesses of all sizes to find global partners, and the DEC's are a practical way for us to share our expertise with them," says Lashutka. "It's exciting to see how comfortable more companies are becoming with the issues of global business, and I am a committed partner of the Commercial Service and appreciate its assistance to the exporting community." ■